

Bibliography of Jean Nicolet /

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF JEAN NICOLET. BY CONSUL WILLSHIRE BUTTERFIELD.

Before giving a list of the different works which, to a greater or less extent, make mention of the first white man who, in 1634, visited the territory now constituting the State of Wisconsin, it is proper to state that some knowledge had been gained of the country. What the extent of this information was, and how it came to the ears of civilized men, will be briefly mentioned as preliminary to naming the sources from which material can be drawn concerning John Nicolet, the explorer, to whom reference has just been made.

Early in the seventeenth century, French settlements were scattered along the wooded shores of the river St. Lawrence, in Canada. To the westward of these, upon the Ottawa river, Lake Huron and Georgian bay, were living several Indian nations. Between them and the French settlers, there soon sprang up commercial relations; besides, it was not long before missionaries of the Roman Catholic church began to labor with some of them. Travelers, too, made extended journeys into their country.

These settlers, missionaries and travelers gathered from the savages not only accounts of countries adjacent to their own, but of regions more remote. They heard from them of a great lake beyond Lake Huron, at the outlet of which was a considerable rapid this vast body of fresh water was Lake Superior. And they also got reports of a much smaller lake called by the Indians who spoke of it, "Winnipegou": this was Winnebago lake. A river ran through this lake—the present Fox river; but the stream was known to the Indians east by the same name as the lake.

As early as 1615, a nation of Indians had been heard of, called the Mascoutins. These savages were frequently at war with the tribes near the head of Georgian bay, and with some further eastward. Now, the homes of the Mascoutins were upon the Fox river, above

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Winnebago lake, their territory extending southeastwardly, as far, possibly, as the site of the present city of Chicago, if not beyond. A brief reference to certain individuals of this nation has been preserved ante-dating the year 1634.

A knowledge of the Winnebagoes was early obtained—at least before the year 1632. They were spoken of by the Indians who gave the French an account of them, as the “Winnipegou.” More was learned of this nation than of the Mascoutins. They were known as a people who had originally migrated from the shore of a distant sea; and their name had reference to this fact. The settlers upon the St. Lawrence had, however, very erroneous ideas of the location of these savages. Winnebago lake was supposed to be to the northward of Lake Huron, and the Fox river flowed southward into it; while the Winnebagoes were known to dwell not far from the last-mentioned lake. Lake Michigan and Green bay had not as yet been heard of. Such was the information that the French had gathered of the present Wisconsin, before any part of it had been explored by civilized man; extending, as we have seen, to two of its lakes and one of its rivers; also to two of the savage tribes having their homes and hunting-grounds, whole or in part, within its present boundaries.

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